Colin Roach press cuttings

Court may decide Roach inquest venue

By Nicholas Timmins

The Greater London Council is considering legal action to force the inquest into the death of Colin Roach to be held in Hackney Town Hall rather than in St Pancras Coroner's Court.

The council has written to the coroner, Dr Douglas Chambers, asking him to move the inquest, due to open on Monday. If he does not do so, the council says that its legal and general committee will be asked on Tuesday to approve legal action aimed at having the inquest moved.

The GLC has taken counsel's opinion to the effect that it has the power under the London government Act to provide proper accommodation for the inquest, and argues that St Pancras Coroner's Court is too aroused much public interest.

Mr Roach, aged 21, died from shotgun wounds in the entrance to Stoke Newington police station in January, and there have been five demonstrations in connexion with his death.

The coroner has rejected a request to move the inquest from the court, which can seat about forty people.

The Times Saturday April 16 1983

Colin Roach 'was hearing voices before his death'

By Nicholas Timmins

Colin Roach, aged 21, who died of shotgun wounds in the entrance to Stoke Newington police station, in north London, last January, was disturbed and hearing voices before his death, the resumed inquest was told yesterday.

Dr Elizabeth Cox, a general practitioner, who treated him after his release from a three-week sentence in Pentonville prison, said that his relatives had said he was hearing voices which were telling him "his house was cursed and everyone was to get out and leave him to manage the problem himself".

Dr Cox, who saw Mr Roach at his home in Lanfranc Road, Bow, twice in the eight days before his death prescribed a drug to combat anxiety and later the more powerful chlorpromazine because she believed his condition presented psychotic features.

But she told the inquest, at Clerkenwell County Court, that when she saw him two days before his death there was no suggestion that he was suicidal. "He was feeling much better, no longer hearing voices and he was able tot concentrate well."

The court was told by Mr John Marriage, QC, for the Metropolitan Police, that Mr Roach had not been taking all the prescribed tablets and had been smoking cannabis.

His father, Mr James Roach, said that his son had been depressed. But he challenged the statement he is alleged to have made at Stoke Newington police station on the night of his son's death, in which he is alleged to have said that he had been talking about voodoo.

Mr Marrige read out part of the statement in which Mr James Roach is alleged to have said: "He came out of prison two weeks ago and since then he has been acting strange. He's been saying that he could hear voices and he must go out of the house because someone is trying to do something.

"He was talking about voodoo and the voices he kept saying he could hear. He was sick, because there were no voices except in his head. It got so bad we called the emergency doctor."

Mr Roach challenged the statement yesterday. Some of it was false, although some was true, he said.

He had arrived at the police station about 12.30 am on January 13, but was not told of his son's death until about 3.00 am.

He had initialled some changes in the statement before signing it, he agreed. But he later told the inquest that he had difficulty reading and writing.

The jury of five men and five women, six of them black, heard that after Mr Colin Roach's release from prison on December 29 his family called out a doctor on January 1.

Dr Cox said she saw Roach on January 4, when she prescribed an anti-anxiety drug. She called round again on January 6, but Mr Roach was out.

His sister and mother, she told the inquest, against a muted protest from Mrs Roach in the public gallery, had said he was hearing voices.

She changed the medication to chlorpromazine. "I felt his behaviour had changed. There was less restlessness and anxiety and more of a picture with psychotic features."

Mr Marriage said that there were 41 tablets left from a 50-tablet bottle that had been prescribed. Even if Colin Roach had been taking only two a day from the Friday when they were prescribed, there should have been 38 left.

Dr Cox said that if he had stopped taking tablets his symptoms could have returned.

Mr Colin Roach: "Did not take prescribed tablets".

Mr James Roach: Challenged statement.

The Times Tuesday June 7 1983 page 3

Roach inquest interrupted amid parents' shouts of 'lie' and 'bias'

By Nicholas Timmins

The inquest on Mr Colin Roach had to be suspended yesterday morning as his mother accused Dr Douglas Chambers, the Coroner, of bias amid other protests from the public benches.

Earlier Mr James Roach, the dead mans's father, punctuated the evidence of Det Chief Sup Charles Robertson, who headed the inquiry, with shouts of "that is a lie".

Mr Michael Mansfield, counsel for the Roach family, suggested to the jury at Clerkenwell County Court, in London, that everything was not "above board" in the inquiry into the death of Mr Roach, a black man aged 21, from a shotgun wound in the entrance to Stoke Newington police station in January.

Two pathologists, one called in by the family to carry out a second post-mortem examination, and a police firearms expert, have told the inquest they believe the wound, from a shotgun placed inside the mouth, was self-inflicted.

Mr Robertson told the court that he was called to the police station after Mr Roach's body was found. Acting on information from an officer who saw Colin Roach being dropped off near the police station and on descriptions of what Colin Roach had been wearing by two friends who had returned to the police station, he saw Colin's father and told him he believed his son was dead. The time was about 12.45am, he said.

Mr James Roach, who has told the inquest he was not told of his son's death until 3am, said that was a lie.

Mr Robertson said Mr Roach became "most distraught", burying his head in his hands and saying "Why my Colin die?" and "How will I tell the mother?". Mr Roach, from the floor of the court, said "lie, lie, lie. He's telling lies all the time."

Mr Mansfield asked him why the father had not been released until 4am. Was there something in the police station they did not want the father to know? "That allegation", Mr Robertson responded, "is totally and utterly false".

Mr Mansfield said it would be quite improper for him to suggest a policeman shot Mr Roach. But the family were entitled to know why the father was not told about the death for some hours.

"If this is a suicide and that is all it is about, the simplest, most humanitarian thing is for the father to have been told, to have been shown the body and to have been taken home in a police car to his wife to explain the situation."

Dr Chambers said: "That sounds to me more like a complaint against the police". If Mr Roach had been kept at the police station until Christmas it would not have affected the cause of death, he said.

His ruling brought protests from Mrs Roach, who shouted: "He is biased, it is biased, it is what they are doing all the time.

Dr Chambers took the jury out and returned to suspend the hearing until the afternoon with a warning that he would clear the court if such behaviour was repeated.

In the afternoon Mr Robertson agreed there were unusual features to the suicide, if that is what it was. It involved a sawn-off shotgun, it had taken place in a police station, there were no marks from the shotgun recoil on the walls and floor, no marks from Mr Roach's sliding on the floor as his body collapsed,and there was a towel with the body.

But Mr Robertson said that as the night wore on he became more convinced that the injuries were self-inflicted.

The hearing continues on Monday.

The Times Saturday June 18 1983 page 3

Colin Roach shot himself, inquest jury decides by an eight to two majority

By Nicholas Timmins

Colin Roach, the black youth who died, aged 21, from shotgun wounds in the entrance to Stoke Newington police station, north London, in January, committed suicide, the jury in the inquest on his death decided yesterday.

The jury, which included five blacks people, reached the decision by a majority of eight to two at Clerkenwell county court. A female juror wept as the black foreman of the jury announced the decision.

It was greeted with brief uproar from the packed public benches, as Mr James Roach, Colin Roach's father, shouted repeatedly: "Over and over they tell you lies, a pack of lies".

As Det Chief Supt Charles Robertson, the officer in charge of the investigation into the death, left the court a man shouted at him "You are a monster".

But the outburst was followed by a stunned and dignified silence in the courtroom as the family, Mr and Mrs Roach and their daughter Pauline, sat in silence on the bench they had occupied throughout the six-day hearing into Colin Roach's death on January 12.

As they were taken out amid the cameras to their car, Mr Roach said: It was not the jury that made up their minds. It was the coroner

Mr Barnbr Hesse, of the Roach Family Support Committee, said that the campaign for an independent public inquiry would go on. "The inquest proceedings and verdict have since January 12 been regarded as irrelevant to establishing the true circumstances of the death. What has taken place in this court is clearly irrelevant to our campaign for truth and justice.

Earlier in his summing up, Dr Douglas Chambers, the coroner, offered the jury five possible verdicts from an open verdict, to unlawful killing, misadventure, that he shot himself, or that he committed suicide.

He told the jury that the evidence he had heard "does not convince me that anybody was involved other than the deceased himself".

He said that there was understandable reluctance to reach a suicide verdict. The jury could reach a verdict that he shot himself, Dr Chambers said, without deciding whether the action was a deliberate act.

He said taht there were difficulties as there was nothing definite to link the single-barrel sawn-off shotgun with Colin Roach; that the gun had to be in pieces to fit the bag found with the body, and that no one had been traced who knew of Colin Roach speaking about of possessing a gun.

The jury retired at about 1.35pm, returning almost two hours later for guidance on whether they could give a majority verdict and for further guidance on the verdicts available. They returned an hour and a quarter later with the suicide decision.

Background of tension

Youth's death used to fuel mistrust of the police

The inquest verdict that Colin Roach took his own life should, but probably will not, settle the issue.

In the five months since his body was found in the entrance to Stoke Newington police station, north London, in the night of January 12, a sawn-off shotgun lying across the lobby from it, not a scrap of evidence has emerged to show that his death was anything other than a bizarre and tragic suicide.

Yet since his death more than 90 people have been arrested in demonstrations demanding an independent public inquiry into the death and the Colin Roach case has become a cause célèbre.

The reasons lie in part in a direct conflict of evidence between the police and Colin Roach's family and friends over how they were treated on the night of his death; in the history of tension and mistrust of the police in the area; and in the way the death has been used by the left to fuel that mistrust in the cause of seeking more police accountability, at the expense of police and community relations in an area where there are genuine difficulties that need to be tackled, not exacerbated.

Mr and Mrs Roach, Colin Roach's parents, say they were badly treated on the night their son died. They say that Mr Roach arrived at the police station at 12.30 am but was not told of his son's death until 3 am and that the police refused to show him the body, called him a liar, and insisted on taking a statement while he was weeping.

Mr Roach has denied that he said that his son had been talking of voodoo, or that he took a bag and towel, found with the body, when he left home. Mrs Roach repeatedly phoned the police station during the night and was told nothing, she says.

The police say that Mr Roach was told of his son's death at 12.45 am shortly after his arrival, that he was distraught but cooperative, and that he was not shown the body for humanitarian reasons.

Wherever the truth lies, and even if the police treatment of the family was callous, nothing alters the overwhelming medical and circumstantial evidence that Colin Roach killed himself. Two pathologists, one called in by the family to carry out a second post-mortem examination, have told the inquest that they believe the wound was self-inflicted.

A passer-by in the street heard the shot, thought a car had back-fired, looked around and saw no one. The account of the desk officer at the police station of how he heard the shot and found the body had the ring of truth about it.

It is clear, harsh though it is to say it, that the family through the support committee that has received £7,500 in grants from the GLC and Hackney Council, were less than honest with those who marched with them about the state of Colin Roach's mind in the fortnight before he died. He was, they have said, a bit depressed. From the evidence to the inquest, it is clear that he was seriously disturbed.

Allegations that the police were responsible for the death fell on fertile ground in an area where relations between the police and blacks have been bad. Last year, Mr Justice Mars Jones in awarding a black family £50,000 exemplary damages after police illegally entered their home and beat them up in 1976, said that there had been a five-year cover-up of a "brutal, savage and sustained variety of assaults" on them.

Far-left groups moved in to fuel the issue, from Socialist Action and the Revolutionary Communist Party to the instantly created Hackney and Stoke Newington Defence Campaign, which has links with the Revolutionary Communist Group, and to which Hackney Council gave a £1,000 grant.

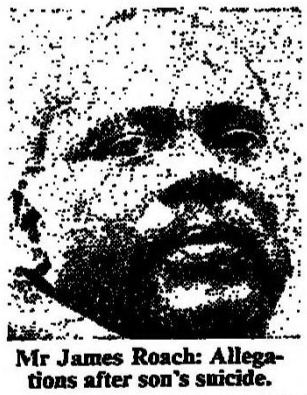
Hackney Council is a firm believer in the GLC's model of police accountabiltiy.

Commander William Taylor, the new head of Hackney and Stoke Newington police, ackowledges that there is "tension and anxiety in some parts of the community", but denies there is widespread fear and distrust of the police.

Hackney Council and the HCRE may believe that changes in police accountability and the complaints system are needed. But the overwhelming impression from Hackney is that a difficult situation is being allowed to drift and is being used to try and achieve those changes.

What is needed is not the present trench warfare but a general willingness to tackle the difficulties jointly.

Colin Roach: Suicide while seriously disturbed.



Mr James Roach: Allegations after son's suicide.

Three jailed after woman | Firemen prais

Hackney drifts leftwards to Government confrontation

By Rupert Morris

The accession to the leadership of Hackney Council on April 28 of Miss Hilda Kean, aged 34, a teacher, is the latest development in a leftward drift for the east London borough. It remains to be seen whether this will produce a confrontation with the Government.

Last night's council meeting was her first as leader. She belongs to the hard left, committed socialists who believe that their leaders should act precisely within the terms of the party's manifesto. They have little time for middle-of-the-road Labour.

But the ousting of Mr Anthony Kendall, the former council leader, by 70 votes to 57 at the party's annual borough conference, was not part of a wholesale victory for her supporters. Hard left candidates lost the contests for deputy leader and chief whip and, perhaps more significantly, only 14 out of the 44 Labour councillors voted for Miss Kean as leader. Elections within the Labour group confirmed the strength of mainstream opinion, and most of the committee chairmanships remained unchanged.

Mr Kendall, the polytechnic lecturer who succeeded Mr John Kotz as Hackney's Labour leader two years ago, was then regarded as a left-winger, and under his leadership the council moved away from its paternal image.

The sensitivity of the black community and the inability of the police to throw off the stigma of the Colin Roach affair produced some of the worst relations imaginable between a local authority and its police force.

But the issue of the rates has recently preoccupied the council. On March 21 it failed to persuade the High Court to declare government spending limits illegal on the ground that they would result in an unacceptable decline in services.

Meanwhile Mr Kendall had been securing Greater London Council aid to enable him to keep the rate increase down to 17 per cent, an acceptable figure in the eyes of most councillors, but regarded by the hard left as a betrayal of local party policy.

The hard left's manifesto of no rent increases, no cuts or redundancies, and no rate increases above the level of inflation, was rejected by the Labour group on Hackney council on the grounds that it would inevitably precipitate a collision with the Government, would put the council outside the law, and culmiate in a government takeover.

But in 1982, in the wake of the party's national decisions on extending its democracy, the Labour group put its elections to a borough conference of Labour councillors, plus up to a hundred delegates from the Hackney North and Hackney South parties.

Of the two borough Labour parties, Hackney North had long been dominated by the hard left, but Hackney South took a more moderate line until January when it, too, voted for the manifesto. At this point, Mr Kendall was sacrificed.

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